

BURDEN OR OPPORTUNITY? ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND TAIWAN

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Because people are passionate, and because contraception, abortion, and infanticide played little role in Taiwan and The Netherlands until well into the 20th century, illegitimacy occurred there, although at strikingly different levels of propensity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We compare the rates, changes, and probable motivations for bearing and rearing illegitimates in these two societies at the poles of the Hajnalian dichotomy.

In the literature dealing with interregional comparisons of illegitimacy, four factors stand out: kinship systems, courtship patterns, female employment and religion. How important are they for an understanding of Dutch-Taiwanese differentials? Before exploring these factors, we discuss our sources and compare the definitions of illegitimacy in the two countries. Because the status of marriage was not similar, illegitimate births are not perfectly comparable. Next, we examine general levels of illegitimacy and its development over time, trying to explain why Taiwanese unmarried women were so much more likely to give birth out of wedlock than Dutch women. In conclusion, we attribute these differences to family formation and courtship, to the value attached to children and to the economic position of single mothers.

The Guidance of Previous Research

Previous research, much of it in continental Europe and Britain, shows that the *spatial* distribution of illegitimacy is not susceptible to easy explanation. Regional differences are important in ratios of illegitimates to total births and to the rates of births per 1000 unmarried women. In 1892, Albert Leffingwell found geographic patterns of considerable significance in 19th century Great Britain as the statistician Jacques Bertillon had seen for France.¹ These differences were not related to urbanization, which was less influential in promoting illegitimacy than might have been expected, urban rates being sometimes the same or lower than rural ones.² Differences between regions continue to be more important.³ Michael Mitterauer's impressive effort to understand regional variation of European illegitimacy shows that high or low regional levels can only occur when several independent variables reinforce one another.⁴ The most important explanatory variables are religion, systems of kinship and family formation, courtship customs, and the availability and character of women's work.

Popular culture in the north-western part of the continent was often remarkably tolerant of prenuptial sexuality. In various parts of 19th century western Europe, a *minority* of first-born children were conceived after the wedding. In many areas of central and northern

¹ Leffingwell, *Illegitimacy*, 54-55. Leffingwell, like many of his contemporaries, mingled biological and cultural heredity in his explanation of regional variation in illegitimacy in a way that now seems racist; excepting this now-outdated interpretation, his early essay stands the test of time well.

² Knodel and Hochstadt, "Urban and rural illegitimacy"; Laslett, "Introduction", 30; Blayo, "Illegitimate births"; Van de Walle, "Illegitimacy in France".

³ Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, 55.

⁴ Mitterauer, *Ledige Mütter*.

Europe, adolescents had sexual rights even before official engagement. Scottish *bundling*, Dutch *kweesten*, Swiss *kiltgang*, and German *fensterln* were all customs that allowed village boys access to nubile girls' bedrooms. Girls could have a succession of these visitors before finally settling on a marriage partner. These customs were strictly controlled by the village boys who did not allow strangers to visit the girls and who checked up on couples during the night. The excitement of customs like these might have compensated for the long period before marriage was possible. In periods of stable social relations, these youth cultures did not necessarily engender high levels of illegitimacy. Disruptions of communities traditionally tolerant towards prenuptial relations may be one of the reasons behind the 19th century increases witnessed in various areas in Europe. In other areas of western Europe (southern France, Ireland) parents exerted a much stricter control on their daughters.⁵ In such cultures, the balance was less easily broken.

An important subset of illegitimacy studies has explored the possibility of “a series of bastard-producing women, living in the same locality, whose activities persisted over several generations, and who tended to be related by kinship or marriage.” Some had repeated illegitimate births. Yet “the concept of a bastardy-prone sub-society becomes complicated when pursued”.⁶ In some places, these groupings contribute heavily to peaks in illegitimacy rates,⁷ and they may cluster tightly within urban settings. This appears to be the case for The Netherlands⁸ and for Taiwan, where Taipei City and perhaps Penghu's capital of Magong include localized populations with high illegitimacy. In recent studies, objections have been raised against the suggestion that repeaters passively suffered their fate, being ‘prone’ to illegitimacy. Several authors point to the ‘functionality’ of illegitimacy. In the absence of social welfare arrangements, illegitimate children may have been an old-age insurance for their mothers.⁹ Without some sort of arrangement for child care and employment options for women and thus a basic tolerance towards bastardy, repeatership would be impossible.

The existence of self-reproducing “sub-societies” suggests the importance of structural and institutional causes for illegitimacy. In a broad-ranging conceptual inquiry, Jenny Teichman summarized the problem by observing that “its formal causes are the institutions which generate the legitimate/illegitimate distinction, and its immediate causes are almost as multifarious as human motives and loves and hates”.¹⁰ The birth of an illegitimate child created problems in both The Netherlands and Taiwan, but their different institutions and values may have given unmarried Taiwanese parents more reason than Dutch ones to tolerate and even value such children. Unlike the Dutch, the Taiwanese did not need to view illegitimacy as Leffingwell put it, with fine Edwardian flair: an “annual harvest of sorrow and shame” requiring “the extreme penalty of ostracism...mercilessly inflicted”.¹¹

For our comparison of the Netherlands and Taiwan, we will use the factors distinguished by Mitterauer as our starting point: kinship systems, courtship patterns, labour relations and religion. The differences between the kinship systems in our respective countries are huge. In The Netherlands the risks associated with the nuclear household formation are compensated for by an elaborate system of communal supports, that, however, strongly discouraged extramarital reproduction. The Taiwanese family system, on the other hand, was

⁵ Fine, “Enfant et normes familiales”; Connell, “Illegitimacy before the famine”.

⁶ Laslett, “The bastardy prone sub-society”, 217.

⁷ Laslett, “The bastardy prone sub-society”, 239.

⁸ Kok, *Langs verboden wegen*.

⁹ Gandy, *Illegitimacy in a Handloom Weaving Community*; Viazzo, “Illegitimacy and the European marriage pattern”; O’Neill, *Social inequality in a Portuguese hamlet*; Blaikie, *Illegitimacy, sex, and society*.

¹⁰ Teichman, *Illegitimacy: A Philosophical Examination*, 22.

¹¹ Leffingwell, *Illegitimacy*, 7, 83.

probably much more tolerant towards additional children, however acquired. Similarly, strong differences existed in courtship as a potential background of illegitimacy. The predominance of early and arranged marriage makes this a much less important factor in the Taiwan case. Where labour relations are concerned, we concentrate on the 'risky' female occupations and on options for unmarried mothers to sustain themselves. In addition, we want to know to what extent repeatership accounts for overall levels (and differences) in illegitimacy. How can we explain repeatership? Can it be ascribed to a family building strategy of women? Finally we treat religion as a background variable here. In the Netherlands, the Christian churches, in particular the Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant ones, were fairly effective in enforcing their moral codes.¹² In Taiwan, the spectrum of folk religious practice offered no boundaries of belief or behavior that might affect illegitimacy rates.

The data

In this paper, a variety of data have been used. Because in the Netherlands, individual sites yielded too little information, we have used censuses and published statistics to present the general levels and trends. For our detailed analysis we use an analysis of illegitimacy in the coastal province of North-Holland, based in particular on civil records¹³ although its format does not allow for direct comparisons with the Taiwanese household registers. We also employ the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN), a large database under construction that will eventually contain the reconstructed life courses of 77.000 individuals with known background, literacy, occupations, eventual marriage(s) and migratory moves. The database is built from a random sample of a half percent all persons born in The Netherlands between 1812 and 1922.¹⁴ Here, we use the birth certificates (N=42.695) for the period 1860-1919. Finally, we incorporate a legal study of paternity suits in the eastern, rural province of Drenthe between 1909 and 1940.¹⁵ This study has never been used in historical demography, yet it contains many important findings on the backgrounds of illegitimate births.

For Taiwan, we use census data, secondary evidence and the household registry database of 14 field sites from the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica.¹⁶ The household registry data reveal the life course of individuals and households, allowing researchers to follow life events such as household formation, birth, marriage, migration, recognition, etc. The household registry database currently consists of data from two urban (Taipei) districts, townships of intermediate size, and rural townships.

Situating our evidence in the respective local contexts is not our goal here. Illegitimacy ratios for the Netherlands were much lower than those in most other European countries¹⁷; Leffingwell noted long ago that the Dutch levels of illegitimacy ranked at the low end of the general northwest European profile.¹⁸ That Taiwan has a higher-than-typical rate for Chinese regions has been both asserted and refuted.¹⁹ In this paper, we are not comparing regions that are convincingly representative of larger areas. They represent only themselves.

¹² Kok, "The moral nation".

¹³ Kok, *Langs verboden wegen*.

¹⁴ Mandemakers, "Historical Sample of the Netherlands".

¹⁵ Overdiep, *Rechtsbescherming*.

¹⁶ Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China*; Wolf, *Sexual attraction and childhood association*; Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan".

¹⁷ Kok, "The moral nation"; Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan".

¹⁸ Leffingwell, *Illegitimacy*, 51-52.

¹⁹ The reliability of the household registry data, described elsewhere (Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China*) allows researchers to study illegitimacy in a Chinese society better than through

The general levels and trends of illegitimacy in the Dutch and Taiwanese populations are presented using illegitimate birth ratio and age-specific fertility rates for never-married and widowed/divorced women. Coale's index of non-marital fertility (Ih) in Taiwan and The Netherlands from Barrett was also used for contrast.²⁰

Definitions of Marriage and Illegitimacy

The Netherlands

Compared to the Chinese institution, European marriage was elegant in its monogamous and legal simplicity: only an officially married couple could produce legitimate offspring. In the legal definition of illegitimacy in The Netherlands the civil status of the mother was crucial. Mothers of illegitimates were either unmarried or their former marriage had ended at least 300 days before the birth. Thus, children resulting from the adultery of a married woman were registered as legitimate, unless her husband had refused the notification and had started a complicated procedure to dispute the legitimacy of the child.

Under certain conditions, an illegitimate child could be recognized. Only 'natural' children—those of parents who were both unmarried—could be *recognized*—an official status between legitimate and illegitimate. Children begotten in incestuous or adulterous relationships could never be recognized. The registrar was not entitled to record the name of the biological father unless he officially recognized the child. An unmarried father could only recognize his child by producing a document attesting to the mother's consent to the recognition. Recognition was a voluntary act by the begetter of an illegitimate child that legally acknowledged paternity and admitted his obligation to provide for the child. The child received its father's last name and a right to inherit one-third of what he might have been given as a legitimate child. Until 1947, children could in principle be recognized only by their biological father. However, it was likely that illegitimate children were often recognized by a new partner of their mother, who in this way adopted the child.

Recognized children were automatically *legitimated* (they became equal to legitimate children in inheritance rights) when their parents married. Finally, parents who had missed the opportunity to legitimize their children on the marriage certificate could apply for so-called 'Royal letters of legitimation,' which were granted by the King after an inquest by the Supreme Court of The Netherlands. These letters could also be granted when one of the parents had died before their (already) recognized children could be legitimated by marriage.

In the early 19th century, when French civil law was adopted in The Netherlands (1809) the traditional *paternity suits* were abolished. In these suits, the authorities made the begetters of bastards liable for the consequences, at least to the degree of paying child support. In them, single mothers could try to regain their lost respectability by demonstrating how their lovers had betrayed their marriage promises. The restoration of a woman's honour was very important in subsequent attempts at finding a marriage partner. For the single mothers, therefore, the abolition of paternity suits increased their vulnerability. In 1911, however, paternity suits were reintroduced. Unwed mothers could not sue a putative father

any other sources. Taiwan illegitimacy rates have been described as much higher than those on the mainland of China where Lee and Wang ("Malthusian Models and Chinese Realities", 45, n. 42) have suggested it was virtually non-existent. However, these figures are derived from records that generally did not register children until the age of 16 and were compiled by elite family members. Genealogies normatively ignored sexual irregularities, for they served as claims to inheritance. We continue to rely on Taiwan data as the most accurate for investigations such as this.

²⁰ Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan".

themselves; a special representative (e.g. the village constable) had to act on their behalf. The request for child support implied a lengthy procedure, in which finally a court could judge a man to be responsible for the procreation and sustenance until the age of majority of an illegitimate child. For one Dutch province, it has been calculated that between 1911 and 1940, in 47% of relevant cases of illegitimacy an unwed mother took legal proceedings against the father. About a third of these suits (35.7%) resulted in conviction.²¹

During our period, the Dutch state not only enabled marriages. It could also prohibit them, not only in the obvious cases of bigamy or incest, but also when a prospective groom was serving in the military, when he wanted to marry his sister-in-law, when he could not procure the necessary documents or when he met with the disapproval of his parents.

Taiwan

Chinese marriage when defined most strictly was simple, and produced legitimate offspring. When “marriage” is glossed more expansively to include concubines, the simplicity of the concept begins to blur (Freedman 1950). The accepted sexual liberty especially of rich Chinese men produced many offspring who were not necessarily illegitimate in the Chinese continuum of negotiable marriage practices. Once a frontier region with few elites, Taiwan became a Japanese colony where late imperial Chinese family law was implemented with little modification. Historically, the Chinese state controlled many aspects of kinship²², but rarely intervened in marriage except to prohibit as incest all marriages between people of the same surname. During the last three hundred years, imperial edicts enjoining ever more rigid chastity for women of all classes made their sexual conduct a matter “of highest import, as if the state were enlisting them as guardians of the fragile boundaries of normative family order”.²³ The outcome of a non-marital birth could have wide-ranging consequences for the mother: promotion from bedmate to concubine, even to wife, was possible. But so was being prostituted as a state slave.²⁴ The statuses of attachment of a woman and her children to a man were multiple.

A Chinese marriage was formed through a civil contract between the heads of two households, usually on behalf of their children. A woman who entered her husband’s household as a bride, a *xin niang*, gained the status of wife, *fu*. The boys she bore were *dizi*, automatically heirs to their father’s property, and to hers, if she had any. The girls she bore, *nuzi*, ideally were owed a future marriage, to be arranged by her parents. If a wife engaged in adultery that gave scandal, the most likely outcome would be divorce. Her husband’s children would remain behind; fruits of an adulterous union would be registered as *sizhengzi* in her official household, with her registered as mother, and no father’s name given.

Some women entered households as concubines, *qie*. Unlike in the Netherlands, where concubinage was socially and legally unacceptable, in Taiwan concubines had recognized civil status. A concubine’s husband need not yet have a formal wife; she might be added later, or the concubine promoted to this status. The north China proverb, “A bedroom is not a (formal reception) hall; and a concubine is not a wife” underlines the inequality between the two. Nor was concubinage a single status with precisely defined rights and duties, as Sheieh Bau Hwa has so richly documented for Ming China.²⁵ A woman’s social background, the ritual style of her entry into the husband’s household, her skill at negotiating both power and authority, and whether and in what time frame she bore male children made for more or less

²¹ Overdiep, *Rechtsbescherming*, 214-232.

²² Gates, *China’s Motor*.

²³ Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 306.

²⁴ Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants*; Sheieh, *Concubines in Chinese Society*.

²⁵ Sheieh, *Concubines in Chinese Society*.

powerful concubines who could more or less effectively assure their children of their rights as heirs or marriageable daughters. Struggles among women in complex households to gain favor for their children from the children's common father are the very stuff of Chinese drama and fiction. In Taiwan, a concubine's children were registered as *shuzi*, but would be promoted to *dizi* should the husband promote his concubine to wife.

A man might (and should) regularize a sexual relationship with a resident maid should she bear him a son by promoting her from bedmate to concubine (perhaps one of lowly status) and the child from *sishengzi* to *shuzi*, perhaps later to *dizi*. The status of irregularly born daughters depended on the whim of the household head.

Sishengzi, not registered as sons of their father, were not his heirs. *Dizi* were automatic (and legally mandated) heirs, while *shuzi* might find their claims to their father's property contested on various grounds by their half-brothers or by the full wife. Another aspect of heirship, responsibility for ancestral tablets, was typically passed to a main heir, usually the first son of a man's wife. In Taiwan, he customarily received an extra portion of property to cover the expenses of worship that he and his wife performed on behalf of his siblings. A concubine's son was only chosen for this responsibility when the wife had born no son, and then was promoted from *shuzi* to *dizi*.

A woman's civil status affected her role in ancestor worship whether she bore children or not. Unlike a wife, a concubine could not worship her husband's ancestors, nor did she become a family ancestor after death. "Only her own son offered sacrifices for her," and never in an ancestral temple.²⁶ A concubine's son was the legal descendant of his father's full wife, whose spirit he paid reverence to after her death.

The cultural chasm between Dutch and Taiwanese practice is not as great as the previous materials may suggest. In Taiwan, concubines and their offspring represent cultural categories against which the more normative statuses were defined, but they were statistically trivial. Only 1-2% of all Taiwan births were *shuzi*, compared with 2-4% as *sishengzi*; and only 2.0% were promoted from *sishengzi* to *dizi* and 13.3% from *sishengzi* to *shuzi*. Paternal recognition cut down sharply on the number of formal illegitimates in both populations, and adoptions increased the effect. The percentage of recognized was 15.3% and adopted was 16.9%. In the Taipei subsample, of 1053 illegitimates who were born, 13.5% were recognized and 13.2% were legitimated by being adopted out. In the second half of the 19th century, it can be estimated that 30 to 40 percent of all Dutch illegitimately-born children were recognized and subsequently legitimated by marriage. As mentioned above, official adoption was ruled out. However, we estimate that about half of all recognitions were done by stepfathers, which amounts to adoption.²⁷

Levels and trends

Figure 1 shows the ratio of illegitimate births to all (live) births, the simplest measure of the incidence of illegitimacy, for both societies. For Taiwan, the first ratio counts the children of concubines (*shuzi*) among the illegitimates and the second counts them among the legitimate children. Netherlands and Taiwan trends in illegitimacy clearly diverge, continually declining in the former and rising steadily in the latter. Levels were not very different however. In both countries, only a small minority of children (2-5%) were born out of wedlock. They differed

²⁶ Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, 125.

²⁷ We base our estimation on the Drenthe survey. In the first half of the 20th century, 1474 illegitimate children were recognized by men. Only 721 of these men were the biological fathers of their children, Overdiep, *Rechtsbescherming*, 384.

in the *propensity* of unmarried women to bear children, however. With the relative proportion of unmarried women in Taiwan so much lower than in the Netherlands, their non-marital fertility was much higher (Figure 2).

[Figure 1 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

Taiwanese not-married women can be further classified into the never-married (before bearing the child) and the widowed/divorced. The divorce rate was relatively high. For all age groups the non-marital fertility was higher for Taiwanese than for Dutch women: 1.5 to 3.9 per 1000 women for the Netherlands but 14.2 to 80.9 for the never-married women and 18.2 to 102.8 for the widowed/divorced (age groups 45/49 excluded). For the 20-34 age groups, the risk of an illegitimate birth is 17 to 30 times higher for the Taiwanese than for the Dutch women. Figure 2 also shows that the non-marital fertility of young widows/divorcees was markedly higher than that of young, unmarried women. This is consistent with the argument on the comparative value of children below. The low fertility of unmarried teenagers testifies to the strict sexual segregation of adolescents in Chinese society, at least those not married in the minor fashion.²⁸

Did levels of illegitimacy change over time in the Netherlands and Taiwan? According to Barrett using Coale's Index of Non-marital Fertility (I_n), there has been a decline in non-marital fertility for the Netherlands and a continued rise for Taiwan, a pattern consistent with patterns seen in Figure 1 based on illegitimate birth ratios.²⁹ Nevertheless, in the birth cohort analysis of age-specific non-marital fertility using household registry data, the increase in illegitimacy is not found. As shown in Figure 3, women from the younger cohorts do not necessarily have higher non-marital fertility than women from the older cohorts. Only 16-24 year-old widows and the divorced from the later birth cohorts had slightly higher non-marital fertility than the counterparts from the younger cohort.

[Figure 3 about here]

Courtship and control

Western European and Chinese family systems sought marriage partners differently. In Chinese societies, practically all marriages were arranged. Even when the future spouses were known to one another, they spent little unsupervised time together except in minor marriages. In Europe, only marriages in the elite were more or less arranged and meetings between the fiancées were chaperoned. In other social groups, adolescent children found their own partners within the range set by their social or religious group, workplace, and customary local public gatherings such as church and local festivals. European illegitimacy may have increased during the nineteenth centuries because couples willingly took more risks during their courtship. However, many authors have pointed to the corrosion of the mechanisms surrounding premarital courting by the mobility associated with the agrarian and industrial revolutions.³⁰

²⁸ Fricke, Chang and Yang, "Historical and Ethnographic Perspectives", 43.

²⁹ Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan", 39.

³⁰ Kok, "Passion, reason and human weakness".

The Netherlands

Premarital courtship that includes sexual intercourse contains the risk of illegitimacy. When a child was on the way, a frustration or delay of marriage plans could then lead to the child being born illegitimate before the parents married. It could then be legitimated by the marriage of the parents and carried little stigma. If, before he could marry the mother, the father died, became unemployed, absconded, or was still in military service, the child remained illegitimate.

How much illegitimacy resulted from couples who were planning to marry, but began sexual intercourse before the wedding? We can look at the relationship between illegitimacy and 'ordinary,' sexually permissive, premarital courtship by comparing the ages at which first children were born both within and outside marriage. At the time of their first birth, single mothers in the province of North-Holland (western Netherlands) were roughly of the same age (around 24 years) as married mothers whose first child was prenuptially conceived.³¹ Thus, their (first) pregnancies may have occurred during 'normal' courtship. In the 19th century, about a third of North-Holland illegitimates were legitimated by the marriage of the parents, about two-third of them below age two. It seems likely that a number of planned marriages had been postponed.

Prenuptial pregnancies were very common. In particular in Protestant areas, they often involved the majority of first-born children. However, illegitimacy was a rare phenomenon. Clearly, premarital license did not result in high levels of illegitimacy. We only find such a link between courtship behaviour and illegitimacy when pregnant couples were not subject to social pressures to marry. Social control ensuring marriage was particularly effective when exerted by peers, neighbors and employers. Thus, geographical mobility or secrecy of lovers led to an increased chance of an illegitimate birth among itinerant workers or soldiers who could easily abscond, or among living-in servants, including agricultural workers, who tended to hide their affairs from their employers from fear of being dismissed. When women became pregnant in such circumstances, there were no witnesses to put pressure on an hesitant lover. Illegitimacy in the Netherlands typically occurred when large groups of unmarried male and female workers were employed and housed together, without supervision from the farmers or factory owners. Even these instances were quite rare due to the small-scale nature of Dutch economy.³²

An analysis of all paternity suits for one Dutch province enables us to probe somewhat deeper.³³ In the sparsely populated province of Drenthe, in the eastern part of The Netherlands, 2721 illegitimate children were born between 1910 and 1940. Of these children, 223 died within a fortnight, 375 children were legitimated shortly, 367 children were born in a consensual union (see below), and 4 children were recognized by the father without a subsequent marriage. Thus, in principle, a paternity suit could be started on behalf of the 1752 remaining children. The mother did so in only 818 cases. The files of these cases disclose that only 141 out of 721³⁴ relationships can be characterized as a stable union with a clear prospect of marriage. In other words, on the basis of the files we can calculate the share of stable unions as 19.6%. Another calculation is possible. We have seen that 375 children were legitimated soon after their birth. Mothers who did not file paternity suits probably were aware that they would fail. Perhaps they could not even name a father. Those who did not litigate (N=934) had probably not formed stable courtships. Another calculation of the stable courtships reads: [legitimations(375)+ recognitions(4)+ stable courtships according to

³¹ Kok, *Langs verboden wegen*.

³² Kok, "The moral nation".

³³ Overdiep, *Rechtsbescherming*.

³⁴ 97 remain unqualified.

files(141)]/[total(2721)- infant deaths(223)- unknown relationships in files(97)]=21.7%. Both methods suggest that only about a fifth of illegitimate children were born to couples that had intended to marry.

The province of Drenthe is not representative of the rest of the Netherlands. Until the late 19th century remote, underpopulated and agrarian, reclamations and peat digging attracted itinerant workers and fomented grave social problems and high levels of illegitimacy. Perhaps frustrated marriage was a less important background of illegitimacy there than elsewhere. The majority of the paternity suits were associated with 'unstable' relationships that had already broken up before the pregnancy was discovered. In a secret affair, it was difficult for the girl to have her ex-lover sentenced.

Taiwan

In Taiwan, prospective spouses in major marriages were kept strictly apart before marriage. Youngsters engaged in the minor fashion, living together as brother and sister, had easy sexual access. Parents often waited to register a minor marriage until couples had accepted the match; a clear sign of this was pregnancy.³⁵ Thus, between a fifth and a quarter of all brides in minor marriages were pregnant.³⁶

Daughters in families that lacked male labour often remained with their parents, and husbands joined them there. Uxorilocal marriages were sometimes preceded by courtship, for brides who married uxorilocally were often pregnant, and single mothers who married tended to do so uxorilocally. This is especially apparent in the birth cohorts of 1901-1920 (see Table 1). Some daughters from families without sons worked in prostitution to help sustain the family. On becoming pregnant, the woman might return home, making an uxorilocal marriage of her own or her parents' choice. When the marriage was not arranged in time, the child would be born illegitimate. Alternatively, she might bear an illegitimate child (or two or three), returning to sex work until her price dropped, and then marry. By this time, she could make an independent marriage choice, having fulfilled her duty to her parents by sending them her earnings. Depending on the couple's financial options, they might choose uxorilocal or neolocal marriage.

[table 1 about here]

Value of children: Taiwanese pronatalism

In Taiwan as everywhere, children and grandchildren brought liveliness, warmth, and joy. Chinese people value children, and especially sons, for the part they have in continuing descent lines and maintaining aging parents. Where inter-village feuding was common, sons made for a strong family that others would fear to bully. Daughters, too, were wanted, though their status ranked below that of their brothers; when necessary they could partially substitute for sons. The economic utility of children for their parents was openly recognized in a way that their emotional significance was not. Elite ideology and popular practice required parents and especially fathers to limit demonstrations of affection to only their very young children.

³⁵ Wolf, "The women of Hai-shan", 103n.

³⁶ Bridal pregnancy in minor marriages does not necessarily contradict Arthur Wolf's aversion hypothesis, that early childhood association between prospective spouses rendered them sexually uninteresting to each other. This phenomenon was relatively weak in children raised together after their first few years of life, and is, like all biological responses, subject to much individual variation (Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China*; Wolf, *Sexual attraction and childhood association*).

Emotional closeness was expressed in more practical fashion, in gifts and in work.³⁷ Parents were obliged to sacrifice and exert themselves on behalf of their children, and could expect exertion and sacrifice in return when the children reached adulthood. Although most children were born to the parents who reared and later depended on them, adoption was extremely common, as were other forms of fosterage and dependency. Even women who never married, such as nuns, and divorcees and young widows recognized the importance of children to their present and future lives. Many adopted children or bore them out of wedlock.

Taiwan's household registers cannot tell us the intentions of the women who bore illegitimate children. Were their babies the unintended consequence of love affairs, rape, or of bartering their sexuality to bring a man's help to their domestic economy?³⁸ Or were they part of their mother's own family-building strategy? Considerable evidence exists for south China that substantial numbers of women were attracted by the possibility of creating a family of own or adopted children independently of the controls that were imposed by marriage.

To gain better understanding of whether women simply found ways to survive having born illegitimate children or whether they considered single mother-headed households a positive career move, we may begin with the unexpectedly high fertility of widows. In Taiwan, lineages were comparatively smaller and weaker than those in mainland China, poorly positioned to monitor the behavior of audacious widows. But widows incurred disesteem by threatening the normal father-to-son inheritance of her legitimate children. By marrying again, she lost rights to her husband's children and to any property usufruct she held through them. Widows had significant incentives to expand their families without remarrying.

Widows and divorcees bore almost 36% of Taiwan's illegitimates, as shown in Table 2. A divorced or widowed woman who bore one illegitimate child may simply have had bad luck, but those who bore more than one illegitimate may have found that having a fatherless family was not harshly sanctioned. Ethnographic evidence suggests that for many ordinary, non-elite Taiwanese, this was true, particularly for daughters in families lacking in sons.³⁹ A stronger hypothesis is that the women themselves were building families to what they considered an appropriate size. That younger widows and divorcees were high in illegitimacy suggests that they were following the same family-building strategy as married women.⁴⁰

Repeatership among widows and divorcees was common in our Taiwan field sites: 35.9% of widows and divorcees who had illegitimate children had more than one. One ambitious divorcee in Taipei had eleven (Gates and Hsieh ms. 2004). Following the same logic, the 43.3 % of never-married mothers of one or more illegitimates may be suspected of pursuing a family-building strategy. If so, the never-married mothers were at a disadvantage compared to widows and divorcees who quite probably already had children.

[table 2 about here]

Value of children: The Netherlands versus Taiwan

Children were valued differently in Taiwan and The Netherlands. Part of this difference can be accounted for by the much longer period of childhood and premarital adulthood characteristic of the Dutch. This extended the period of post-puberty sexual abstinence

³⁷ Potter and Potter, *China's Peasants*.

³⁸ Fricke, Chang and Yang, "Historical and Ethnographic Perspectives", 44.

³⁹ Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*.

⁴⁰ Wolf, "Women, Widowhood, and Fertility".

expected of young people to as much as a decade, while Taiwanese girls were typically married shortly after their first menses, at about 16. The consequences for this difference of exposure to non-marital pregnancy are complex. Supervision over the sexual behavior of unmarried Dutch youths was a major cultural problem; in Taiwan, girls and boys were normatively married almost as soon as they were capable of conception. The value of children may have been somewhat undercut for Dutch parents by the enormous concern and effort to inhibit their children's sexual experience throughout the teens and early twenties.

The right to benefit from children's labor and earnings also may have affected the value of children as understood by Dutch and Taiwanese. By the late 19th century, schooling was common for Dutch boys and girls, adding actual and opportunity costs to the parental burden. In Taiwan, schooling was not general for children until two decades into the Japanese period. While many Dutch youths left home for paid employment in their late teens, many did not become economically independent until marriage—indeed, marriage was normatively delayed until such independence was assured. Working “children” remitted their wages to their parents and saved for marriage. Unmarried, wage-earning Taiwanese youths (and these were few, island-wide) also remitted wages, but they did not achieve economic independence through or at marriage. Independence in career choice, use of earned wages, and marital decisions was greater in The Netherlands than in Taiwan. Although they married late, Dutch sons and daughters left the parental economy when marriage occurred. In purely economic terms, it might even be said of Dutch sons and daughters what Chinese say only about daughters: that they are *pei qian huo*-- “goods on which one loses money.”

Dutch illegitimate children were likely to carry yet more direct economic, social, and religious costs than legitimate ones. Dutch widows and divorced women, many of whom may already have had children, formed only a small minority among mothers of illegitimate children (see Table 2). The lower propensity of Dutch women testifies to the limited economic value in its strictly nuclear-family regime. The structural anomalousness of children born outside a nuclear family lowered their value still further.

Social attitudes toward illegitimates and their mothers also affected behavior, and Dutch and Taiwanese attitudes varied considerably. Given the higher propensity to bear illegitimates among Taiwanese women, we must assume that society more readily made a place for both mother and child. For Taiwanese, patrilineally-anomalous children were problems for the kinship system alone. The social safety net for Chinese who lacked kin did not differ as much from that of Europe as is often supposed. Chinese governments supplied charity in crises such as famine, and permitted private (often Buddhist) organizations to do the same.⁴¹ Official policy also supported “poorhouses, foundling homes, lepers' asylums, old age homes, and public cemeteries, [varying] from period to period and...administered at the local county level...unevenly carried out”⁴², but do not seem to have discriminated systematically against illegitimates and their mothers. Chinese charity was universal, but too intermittent to provide for the predictable stream of unmarried mothers. Kin who had played a role in a girl's sexual vulnerability did not disown her when it resulted in pregnancy. But her fatherless children had no patrilineal claim to either property or standing. Ethnographic evidence suggests that their status per se was not a serious problem for them or for their mothers, especially among the working classes. Outcomes for mothers and children from Taipei sites are examined in another paper.⁴³

In The Netherlands, illegitimates complicated the operation of social institutions that assumed supra-kin responsibility for economic unfortunates. Church, state, and occupational

⁴¹ Will, Wong, and Lee, *Nourish the People*.

⁴² Schak, *A Chinese Beggars' Den*, 17.

⁴³ Gates and Hsieh (ms. 2004).

associations wove a safety net that caught propertyless widows, orphans, the childless elderly, veterans of the region's incessant wars, the ill, and many paupers. Netherlandish charity, however, was typically reserved for the "deserving poor," and the sexual standard for this was high. Dutch widows, if chaste and thus 'deserving,' were prominent receivers of religious and municipal charity and social benefits. Giving birth to a bastard child endangered that privilege.⁴⁴ Illicitly pregnant girls could make no claim on public assistance, and might even be driven from home by her kin. They risked lowered marriage expectations, loss of employment, and social rejection that might result in dire poverty or even prostitution.

A more quantitative approach to answering the question of whether illegitimates were valued or seen as unwelcome burdens is to examine their rates of survival. These figures tell us something, too, about the relative evaluation of boys and girls born under these circumstances. Table 3 shows that illegitimate infants in The Netherlands had much higher mortality rates than legitimate children. Part of this difference has been ascribed to infanticide.⁴⁵ Clearly, the mothers did not favor boys over girls. Illegitimate male infants died more often than the legitimate, but this corresponded with the excess mortality of legitimate boys. On the contrary, illegitimate infants in Taiwan overall had about the same mortality rates as the legitimate ones. Illegitimates were not valued as unwelcome burdens in Taiwan as in the Netherlands.

[Table 3]

Female Economic Independence

Taiwan

The desire to build a family, even if outside marriage, was no guarantee that the goal can be achieved, for an adequate economic context for female economic independence remained the limiting condition. Most Taiwan mothers whose children had no social father relied on paid work. Niches for unmarried mothers have always existed in Taiwan; unfortunately, the household registers are usually mute on women's occupations. Seamstresses could survive on their earnings; some households allowed servants to keep their children with them; handicraft production sustained some single mothers; and the entertainment services, including prostitution, hired many more. During the last third of the 19th century, Taiwan's economy expanded on a trajectory that only slowed in the 1930s, creating many new occupations for women. Female niches grew disproportionately in two notable sectors: sex work and the tea industry, both concentrated in Taipei.

Most recruits for sex work were eldest daughters contracted by their parents for a few years until later-born children could provide the help needed at home. Parents were necessarily responsible for putting girls into prostitution; they had the right and the responsibility to allocate their daughters' labor. Girls working away from home might retain their registration in their parents' household, making use of the "temporary outregistration" (*ji liu*) category to account for their absence there and their presence in that of their employer (where they would be temporarily registered in); or they might be permanently transferred from their parents' to another household when they worked as a brothel-keeper or live-in servant. Before the Japanese period, transfers as *cabokana* (bondservants) were legal and not uncommon; under Japanese rule, with bondservanthood made illegal, girls were registered into households that depended on sex work as adopted daughters or adopted daughters-in-law.

⁴⁴ Alberts, Gevallen, niet gebroken.

⁴⁵ Kok, Van Poppel and Kruse, "Mortality among Illegitimate Children".

A young woman who had found a niche that could sustain a family of her own sometimes divided herself from the parental household and lived an independent life of family-building.

Comparisons with other parts of the Chinese world shed some light on the problem of connecting prostitution with illegitimacy. In Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, prostitution was an extremely important 'industry'. It has been calculated that about 1 in 42 residents were prostitutes. However, they were certainly not all unmarried. In 1948, at least 9% of Shanghai prostitutes were married. Also, their fertility was very low due to frequent miscarriages and sterility caused by venereal diseases.⁴⁶ Although research on this subject for Taiwan is still very incomplete, scattered evidence suggests that Taipei during its boom years from the expansion of the tea trade in the 1860s through its prosperity under Japan until the war began in the 1930s had an entertainment business roughly parallel to that of Shanghai.

In Taiwan, prostitutes worked alongside women and girls who poured tea and drinks, danced and flirted with customers, sang, and performed, enhancing the sexually-stimulating ambience of bars, coffee shops, dancehalls, and the outer rooms of brothels. Courtesans famous for artistic skills became local stars whose exploits were followed in gossip and tabloid publications. Around these clustered hairdressers, maids, seamstresses, ornament-makers, music and dance teachers, drivers, madams, and pimps. Both famous and lowly were notoriously vulnerable to slipping into illicit sexual relations and to bearing illegitimate children.

Taiwan's towns and cities had extensive entertainment quarters, many of which persisted openly until the 21st century. Cheap hotels functioned as brothels, creating circumstances in which travelers with modest budgets readily observed even if they did not engage in all the available entertainments. "Entertainment," however coarse and commodified, could be found in virtually every large vegetable market in every town and city during our period. As in most similar societies, Taiwan's sex workers sometimes earned enough in their early years to support children and accumulate the capital for a small business, perhaps in the same sector, for their middle years.

The late 19th century tea boom also expanded the work opportunities for women in the Taipei basin. Girls and women picked and sorted tea before it was processed by male specialists, elaborately tested and wrapped, and transported to the docks of Dadaocheng. A few of the region's large plantations hired women pickers, but most of the leaf was plucked by family members from their own bushes. The market for women's waged work in tea was the sorting sheds. During the three seasonal pickings, thousands of girls and women came each day from the villages to sort leaf, as did many from Taipei neighborhoods.⁴⁷ Tea sorters are described as well-turned-out, lively, and confident, doing honorable work at decent wages. Other girls and women, invisible in the record but necessary to the smooth functioning of capitalist extraction cooked, did laundry, entertained, and kept boarding houses for the flood of seasonal men workers.

Temporary and permanent migrants into Taipei made for a radical expansion of the city's population. Between 1920 and 1930, the population increased from 114,140 to 147,620, with an increase of 27% for men and 31% for women, an expansion that opened many opportunities for female independence. To sex work, tea sorting, services for migrants without families, the production of traditional goods (such as spirit money) now in even greater demand were added jobs as teachers, nurses, telephone operators, and, very slowly, clerical workers. With Japanese development, women (and men) found jobs in tobacco, soysauce, and liquor factories. Kaohsiung City was also booming, with growing trade and port facilities that must have created a similar market for women's paid work met largely by migration from the

⁴⁶ Hershatter, "Prostitution and the Market", 266, 272.

⁴⁷ Davidson, *The Island of Formosa*, Lu Meihuan XXXX.

island's villages. This female labor force left only slight traces in the statistical records.⁴⁸ We assume that they gave birth to a very substantial proportion of Taiwan's illegitimates, and that they clustered in parts of Taipei City where cheap rentals were available.

Insight into the conditions that produced many illegitimates comes from the work of Arthur Wolf and Huang Chieh-shan for the Haishan area (1980: 258-259). Of all women who had no brothers, almost 40% gave birth to an illegitimate child, while only 7% of those with at least one older brother did so. Further, among women remaining unmarried at age twenty-five, 70% of the 1891-1895 birth cohort bore an illegitimate, and 43% of the 1916-1920 cohort did so. Wolf and Huang's interpretations of these findings are that parents without sons sometimes delayed arranging marriages for their daughters, putting them into the most lucrative line of work open to them—prostitution. Analyses of larger bodies of data support the logic of this argument. When a girl could earn in a night what her father earned from several days of heavy labor, and when that father faced rearing a growing family with no sons to help him, one can better understand how such decisions were taken.⁴⁹

The Netherlands

Opportunities for women to support themselves and their children were significantly fewer for Dutch than for Taiwanese women. In fact, Dutch female labour force participation rates were very low within western Europe at large, especially in industry. This fact has been attributed to the early demise of cottage industry in the (western) parts of the country as well as to the equally early dominance of the bourgeois cult of the nuclear family in which the wife and mother performed her duties at home.⁵⁰ Women workers were concentrated in agriculture and domestic services. However, these jobs could hardly be combined with motherhood. Social rejection of unmarried women and their children was so strong that even those employed as house servants and farm laborers were fired when discovered to be pregnant. Social policy reflected this opprobrium of single mothers. Typically, the Netherlands were the only western European country not to ratify the 1919 International Labour Organisation's Maternity Protection Convention because it allowed unmarried mothers paid maternal leave.⁵¹ Dutch custom did not tolerate babies being taken along and breast-fed when the mother was working outdoors. Single mothers could not afford wet-nurses. Together, artificial feeding and (willful) neglect resulted in high mortality rates.⁵² Finally, working women earned about 60% of what men earned in a comparable position; the costs of living were not lower for them than for men. It must have been difficult for them to raise their own family in these circumstances.

In the Netherlands, prostitution was not an important background of illegitimacy. In the countryside it appeared to have been quite rare. In his detailed study of illegitimacy in Drenthe, Overdiep only encountered one instance of prostitution by an unmarried woman resulting in a child. In this area, prostitution was limited to a small number of mostly married women, who sometimes joined forces to form an illicit brothel.⁵³ Rural prostitution was rare because of a lack of *demand* for paid sex. Men who wanted sex could simply approach a girl

⁴⁸ Taiwan's household registry system allowed for temporary residence away from the household to which the person planned to return: the *ji liu*. From lists of exits and reentries, we can learn something about such migration behavior. Not all currently existing registers retain these materials, however, and in those that do, some may be missing. Complete analysis may prove impossible.

⁴⁹ Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China*, 164.

⁵⁰ Pott-Buter, *Facts and Fairy Tales*.

⁵¹ Pott-Buter, *Facts and Fairy Tales*.

⁵² Kok, Van Poppel and Kruse, "Mortality among Illegitimate Children".

⁵³ Overdiep, *Rechtsbescherming*.

known for her loose morals. Because girls were not supervised by the parents in the evenings, casual sexual encounters occurred quite often. Only men who lacked the network on information on 'willing' girls, such as mobilized soldiers or immigrants to large cities, had to resort to paid sex. Therefore, prostitution was concentrated in the large cities. However, the frequent sexual contacts of urban prostitutes led relatively seldom to illegitimate births. It has been calculated that only about 10-30% of prostitutes in the cities of Rotterdam and Leyden (18th and 19th centuries) had a child at least once in their lives.⁵⁴ Many prostitutes used contraceptive devices or resorted to abortion. Also, they often suffered from venereal diseases.

Toward an explanation

The Netherlands had many single women who rarely became single mothers, but in Taiwan the reverse was true: single women were few in number, and often were mothers as well. The distinctive local family systems accounts for much of this difference. The nuclearity and neolocality of the Dutch required late marriage. While waiting, adolescents chose their own partners and amassed the resources necessary to founding new households. Because premarital birth could endanger these plans, socialization and social control combined to inspire youths with prudence. Single mothers were not cared for as 'deserving poor,' but faced lives of misery. Courtship and social control are central to the history of Dutch illegitimacy.

In Taiwan, by contrast, marriages were generally arranged at so early an age that sex between unmarried adolescents caused little illegitimacy. However, girls who did not marry young because their earnings were needed at home were remarkably prone to have out-of-wedlock children and then to marry uxorilocally. When daughters were put into prostitution, their illegitimate children were seen as evidence of, and even a reward for the sacrifices of filiality; such grandchildren could not be rejected. In general, Chinese families welcomed additional children, whatever their status. Even when daughters worked at less risky and more reputable jobs, if they lived away from parental supervision, their sexual vulnerability increased along with a likelihood of having an illegitimate child.

Young widows and divorcees were even more prone to have children than single women. Did they also work in 'hazardous' occupations associated with the sex and entertainment industry? Basing his conclusions on census data, Richard Barrett argues that the numerical importance of widows implies that prostitution was a less important background for illegitimate children than Arthur Wolf has suggested.⁵⁵ Because we do not know their occupation, we cannot at this stage confirm or reject this hypothesis. Perhaps they were simply not interested in remarriage but instead extending their own uterine families. In particular in Taipei, the urban economy offered plenty of opportunities of women to sustain themselves and their children.

In both countries, illegitimacy was a fairly rare phenomenon that did not pose a threat to the available resources; general fertility levels were hardly affected by illegitimacy. However, this outcome was reached through completely different mechanisms. In Taiwan, near universal marriage for women ensured that illegitimacy was concentrated among widows, unmarried women without brothers and women in cities that offered female employment opportunities.

⁵⁴ Kok, *Langs verboden wegen*, 55.

⁵⁵ Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan",

In the Netherlands, illegitimate fertility was held in check in spite of late and non-universal marriage. All kinds of social control mechanisms backed up the sexual restraint of adolescents and ensured that couples married when a pregnancy occurred. The cultural and social penalties for a single mother were harsh and her opportunities for employment limited. Until 1911, she had no way of putting (legal) pressure on her absconding boyfriend. The threat of losing esteem, work and social benefits kept most single women from entering sexual relationships.

Finally, however, we are left with a paradox. Taiwan girls were not free to begin their sexual careers at will because the right to dispose of their sexual capacities belonged to their parents. Dutch girls were expected to dispose of themselves, but only after a prolonged period of chaste courtship. Female agency operated very differently, giving greater control over her life to a Dutch than to a Taiwanese woman, but also putting her more at risk for illegitimacy. Contradictorily, Taiwan's strong market for women's labor compatible with unmarried motherhood combined with its family system to generate high propensities to illegitimacy. The Dutch, with few such niches available, were less prone to unmarried motherhood despite their immensely greater courtship opportunities.

Figures to **BURDEN OR OPPORTUNITY?**
ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND TAIWAN

HILL GATES, JAN KOK, SPING WANG

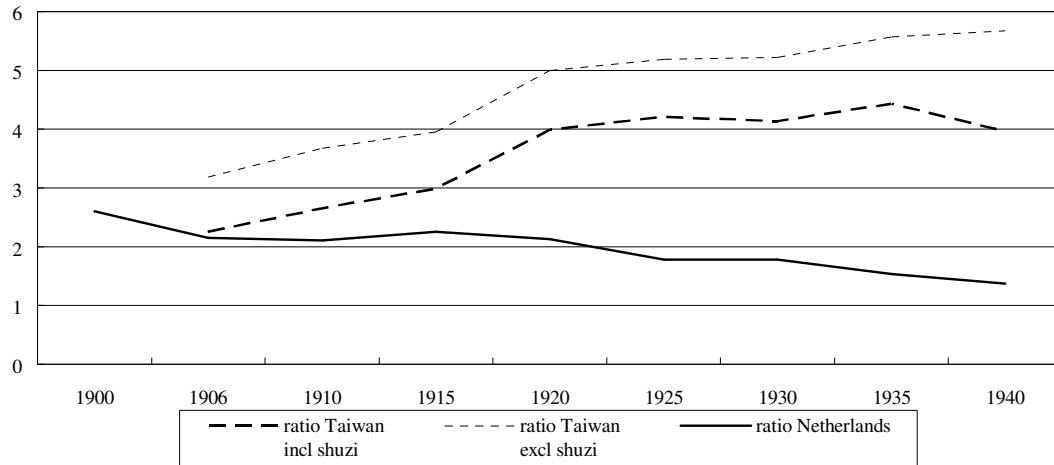


Figure 1. Illegitimate births as a percentage of all births, Taiwan and the Netherlands, 1900-1940

Sources: Barrett, "Short-term trends in Bastardy in Taiwan", 295, Historical Ecological Database and Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *Buitenenechtelijke geboorte 1840-1973* ('s-Gravenhage 1973)

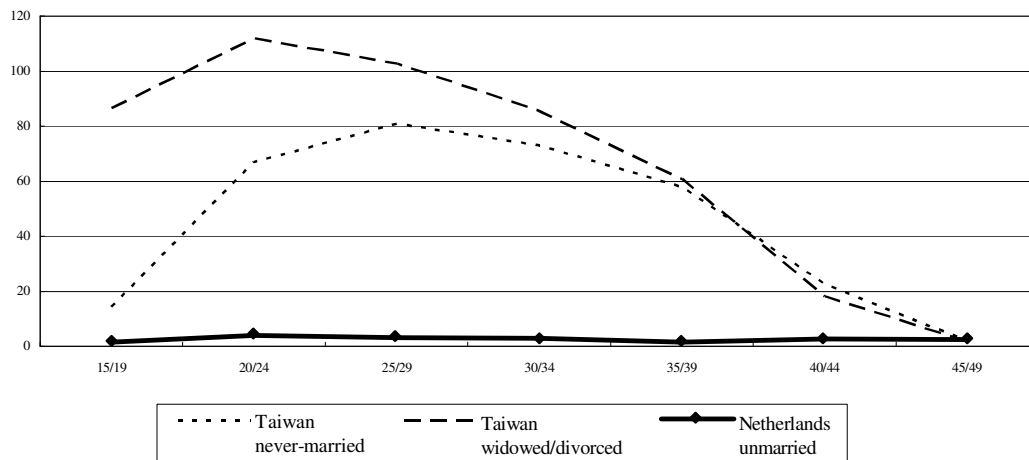


Figure 2. Age-specific fertility rates for never-married and widowed/divorced women, Taiwan and for unmarried women, the Netherlands (births per 1000 woman years)

Sources: For Taiwan Household Registry Database of 14 field sites in 1906-1940, for the Netherlands Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *Buitenenechtelijke geboorte 1840-1973* ('s-Gravenhage 1973) data pertaining to 1936.

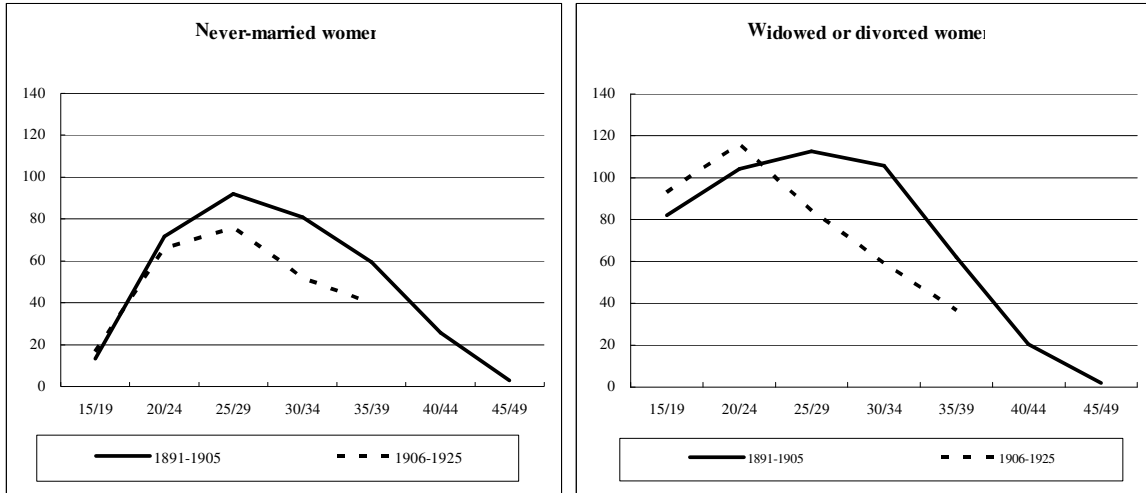


Figure 3. Age specific fertility of never-married women and widowed and divorced women, Taiwan, by Birth Cohort

Tables to **BURDEN OR OPPORTUNITY?**
ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND TAIWAN

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Table 1. Premarital births and prenuptial pregnancy by type of marriage. All field sites Taiwan.

	1891-1900	1901-1910	1911-1920	1921-1930
major marriages				
% prenuptially pregnant	8.1	9.6	11.6	10.1
% premarital births	5.5	4.9	5.0	4.8
minor marriages				
% prenuptially pregnant	20.8	24.5	24.8	24.1
% premarital births	7.8	3.8	2.2	2.3
uxorilocal marriages				
% prenuptially pregnant	13.9	16.3	26.0	26.0
% premarital births	7.2	7.7	9.1	13.2

Table 2. Percentage of widowed or divorced mothers as a percentage of all unwed mothers, by period in which their children were born.

	% widowed or divorced mothers	% illegitimacy	N illegitimate children
Netherlands 1860-1879	10.8	4.8	810
Netherlands 1880-1899	9.4	3.6	552
Netherlands 1900-1919	8.4	2.7	285
Taiwan, 1906-1940	35.8	5.6	4322

Sources: Taiwanese Household Registry Database of 14 field sites and Historical Sample of the Netherlands.

Table 3. Infant mortality (percentage of death within the first year) by legitimacy status and sex, Netherlands and Taiwan

	Illegitimates		legitimates	
	Male	Female	male	female
Netherlands 1905	23.8	23.4	15.4	12.7
Netherlands 1920	15.5	12.9	8.3	7.2
Netherlands 1935	8.0	4.9	4.5	3.4
Taiwan 1906	24.1	17.8	17.4	18.0
Taiwan 1920	21.0	14.2	18.0	13.3
Taiwan 1935	16.1	12.5	16.0	13.2

Sources: For Taiwan, Vital Statistics of the Population, Taihoku, Government-General of Taiwan, Bureau of Official Statistics. For the Netherlands: Bijdragen tot de Statistiek van Nederland. Loop der bevolking.